

Democracy as a Legitimizing Ideology

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Democracy as an abstract belief system bestows rights to individuals and serves egalitarian principles. However, the language of democracy may be used to justify harmful treatment of others in the world. Data from 3 representative samples of adults are presented demonstrating that satisfaction with and support for democracy are associated with support for militarism, a hierarchy-maintaining tool, among those who oppose equality compared with those who support equality. Furthermore, these data highlight the importance of political (Study 2) and historical (Study 3) contexts, demonstrating that democracy is associated with militarism particularly when people oppose equality, in contexts in which democracy is especially valued, and at historical moments when it is militarily expedient (i.e., wartime).

Keywords: legitimizing ideology, democracy, equality, social dominance, militarism

It is almost universally felt that when we call a country democratic we are praising it. . . . Words of this kind are often used in a consciously dishonest way. That is, the person who uses them has his own private definition, but allows his hearer to think he means something quite different. (Orwell, 1946, p. 83)

Since at least Machiavelli, social scientists and philosophers have examined how language can be used to ensure that those who have power in a society maintain it and those who do not have power accept it (Sidanius, Levin, Federico, & Pratto, 2001). Psychologists have relatively re-

cently begun to understand the mechanisms enabling language to maintain social hierarchies (Jost & Hunyady, 2005; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999), and several terms now describe language that serves a hierarchy-maintaining function, such as *hierarchy-enhancing legitimizing ideologies* (Major et al., 2002; Ridgeway, 2001; Sidanius et al., 2001), *legitimizing myths* (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999), *system-justifying ideologies* (Jost & Hunyady, 2005), and *false consciousness* (e.g., Jost & Banaji, 1994; Scott, 1987).¹ Research devoted to belief systems that serve to legitimize social hierarchies has focused on beliefs and attitudes as diverse as sexism, old-fashioned and modern racism, and meritocratic and individualistic beliefs. (e.g., Brandt, 2011; Brandt & Reyna, 2012; Federico & Levin, 2004; Reyna, Henry, Korfmacher, & Tucker, 2006; Schofield, 2009; Sidanius et al., 2001; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). These belief systems have in common that they are explicitly group-based, hierarchy-enhancing or hierarchy-

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¹ The term *legitimizing ideology* is preferred here for its descriptiveness. The word *legitimizing* suggests the legitimization of any socially unacceptable behavior (e.g., violence, oppression), and the word *ideology* invokes broad political influences without requiring assumptions about its truth or falseness (see also Sidanius, Levin, Federico, & Pratto, 2001).

perpetuating, or serve to explain how members of society can and should achieve higher power and status (e.g., “working hard will get a person ahead”).

Motivated Ideological Construal

What has been increasingly explored in the literature on legitimizing ideologies is a class of belief systems that are explicitly hierarchy-*attenuating* but that can be used in the service of hierarchy maintenance or enhancement. That is, there is a class of ideologies whose political use can be for hierarchy-attenuating or hierarchy-enhancing purposes, depending on the motives of the person expressing the beliefs or attitudes, a concept that has been labeled by Eric Knowles and colleagues as *motivated ideological construal* (Knowles, Lowery, Hogan, & Chow, 2009). When a person has motivations for equality, an ideology will be associated with attitudes and behaviors consistent with egalitarianism, but when a person has motivations for inequality, the very same ideology may be associated with attitudes and behaviors consistent with inequality. The ideology is used in service of the motivations.

Examples in the Psychology Literature

The psychological study of the cooptation of historically hierarchy-attenuating ideologies to serve hierarchy-enhancing motivations has covered a range of beliefs, including colorblindness, fairness, and diversity.

Colorblindness. When Martin Luther King, Jr., invoked colorblindness in his famous “I Have a Dream” speech, what he hoped for was that people would judge African Americans as individuals foremost and not automatically negatively on the basis of their skin color. However, colorblindness has since been used as an argument against hierarchy-equalizing policies designed to assist ethnic minorities, such as affirmative action, under the same logic that people should not be selected for anything, bad or good, on the basis of the color of their skin. One series of studies in particular showed that those who are higher in the antiegalitarian social dominance orientation (SDO; Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994) will, especially under threat, construe the idea of colorblindness in

a hierarchy-enhancing way (Knowles et al., 2009).

Fairness. The fairness of the allocation of rewards can similarly be construed in multiple ways depending on an individual’s motives. Fairness can be based on a person’s performance (a merit-based construal) or based on a person’s needs (a need-based construal). People who are higher in SDO construe fairness as a merit-based strategy, whereas those lower in SDO construe it as a needs-based strategy (Pratto, Tatar, & Conway-Lanz, 1999). The important point is that both high- and low-SDO respondents endorse fairness, just that the meaning of fairness may be different depending on one’s motivations.

Diversity. The endorsement of diversity, or equal representation of types of individuals in an organization, can also be construed in a hierarchy-enhancing or hierarchy-attenuating way. When these types of individuals in an organization include racial and ethnic groups, support for diversity has a clear hierarchy-attenuating function by allowing greater representation of disadvantaged groups. However, people higher in SDO may adopt broader construals of diversity, putting weight on occupational diversity (e.g., representation in an organization of engineers, accountants, consultants, marketers) rather than racial diversity, and by doing so may be inclined to perceive an organization to be sufficiently “diverse” (Unzueta, Knowles, & Ho, 2012). This allows a shift in the definition of diversity from a hierarchy-attenuating belief to one that allows the maintenance of existing hierarchies.

The Motivated Construal of Democracy

Democracy is an additional hierarchy-attenuating ideology that has come to the forefront of international debate. Democracy is an abstract value system concerning the protection of human rights, and social dominance theorists have identified it as a hierarchy-attenuating, not hierarchy-enhancing, belief system (Pratto, Sidanius, & Levin, 2006). Even Lenin (1917/2009) saw democracy as central to his ideal of a classless and truly egalitarian society. The same is true for many current definitions of democracy that suggest it is a way of achieving greater equality through the encouragement of involvement in the political process for all. A

web search of the Oxford, Cambridge, American Heritage, and Webster dictionary definitions of democracy shows that all directly mention the importance of equality of the people in terms of their voice or power in the government.² Some dictionaries even include a definition for democracy that epitomizes abstract egalitarianism: “The principles of social equality and respect for the individual within a community” (American Heritage) and “The practice or principles of social equality” (Oxford).

One would not expect support for democracy, then, to be associated with militarism, defined here as support for and confidence in the military as an effective policy-enforcing tool, which has been identified as a means toward achieving status-based hierarchies in the world (Sidanus & Pratto, 1999). The European history of colonialism and imperialism throughout the past 500 years is one of the clearest examples of the use of militarism in the service of achieving power and status on the global scene for various governments and their constituencies (Abernethy, 2000). There have been arguments that current U.S. foreign policy, including militarism, is an example of modern-day imperialism and hegemony (Brilmeyer, 1994; Chomsky, 2004). Evidence in psychology shows that the hierarchy-enhancing position of social dominance orientation is related to support for the military (Zabel & Christopher, 2011), support for increased military spending (Pratto et al., 2000), and support for war (Crawford, 2012).

Yet, democracy has been used as the rationale for a number of military excursions in recent memory. In his 2007 State of the Union Address, in reference to American military activity, former President Bush commented that “Our goal is a democratic Iraq,” explaining the deployment of 20,000 additional troops (Office of the Press Secretary, 2007). The invasions of Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003 were labeled by the U.S. military, respectively, Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom, and the toppling of the Hussein regime in Iraq was followed within 2 years by elections imitating a democratic process (Democracy in Baghdad, 2005).

Furthermore, evidence in social psychology has shown that the language of democracy may lend itself to justifying aggressive acts against other groups, particularly to justify democratic groups aggressing against nondemocratically

organized groups. In a series of studies conducted by Falomir-Pichastor and colleagues, third-party observers to hypothetical conflicts were especially likely to perceive aggressive actions of members of democratic groups against nondemocratic groups as justified, including aggressive interpersonal acts (Falomir-Pichastor, Staerklé, Depuiset, & Butera, 2005, Study 2) and war (Falomir-Pichastor, Staerklé, Pereira, & Butera, 2012). Although this research was based on judgments of third-party observers of hypothetical aggressive democratic actors, it lends strong credence to the idea that democracy may be rallied in the service of hierarchy-maintaining motives.

Of course, the use of militarism in the name of defending and encouraging democracy is hardly unprecedented. Violence or war has played a major role in paving the way for some of the most enduring democracies in the world, including England, France, and the United States (Moore, 1966), and for preventing the spread of authoritarian dictatorships, as in the case against the Nazis. Consequently, the motives involved in military activity may truly be in the service of the spread of democratic ideals. But even scholars who expect democracy to be associated with peace have worried that the current use of democracy to justify militarism may be disingenuous (Russett, 2005).

The connection between beliefs in democracy and militarism may depend on whether the individual holding those beliefs endorses whether social hierarchies should be maintained or attenuated. Our overarching hypothesis was that those more likely to endorse inequality would show a relationship between measures of support for democracy and support for militarism, whereas those more likely to endorse equality should show a weaker or null relationship.

Support for Democracy

The measures we use for support for democracy do not simply ask “Do you support democracy?” in the abstract or in theory, but tie support for democracy to how it is perceived to operate in practice by asking variants on “How

² These definitions were retrieved from the One Look dictionary search engine website on January 3, 2015.

satisfied are you with how democracy works?” People may endorse democracy as an ideal at the same time that they are dissatisfied with how it works in their political context, but we believe measuring the latter, endorsement for how democracy is practiced, helps reduce the ceiling effects we would expect from asking questions about democracy in theory. That is, we would expect nearly everyone to endorse democracy as an ideal, but not everyone to endorse democracy as it is actually practiced. A parallel in 16th century Spain showed the use of Christianity to justify the exploitation of the Americas. Virtually everyone in 16th century Spain believed in God, but not everyone was satisfied with how belief in God was practiced, and those dissatisfied with the practice of Christianity were the ones most opposed to the militarism of the conquest (Knight, 2003). We expected that beliefs about democracy today would operate in a similar fashion.

Overview of the Present Studies

We present three studies where we expected that those more likely to support inequality would show a stronger relationship between support for democracy and measures of support for militarism. Our measures of militarism included beliefs in the importance of military strength, confidence in the military, positive feelings toward the military, and beliefs about escalating military responses toward other countries.

In Study 1, we began with the basic question of whether support for inequality and support for democracy interact to predict support for military action. In Study 2, we explored some of the boundary conditions for these effects. An ideology should serve a hierarchy-enhancing purpose only in locations where that ideology is valued, endorsed, or practiced, and we examined the importance of these context effects.

In Study 3, we considered how the presence of threat may provide a useful trigger for coopting a hierarchy-attenuating ideology for the purpose of hierarchy maintenance. Previous research has shown that this may be true with respect to beliefs in colorblindness: When people higher in SDO are exposed to a sense of group threat, they may be more likely to invoke more hierarchy-maintaining construals of colorblindness (Knowles et al., 2009). Similarly,

with respect to beliefs about democracy, a government may use a threatening event such as a terrorist attack to rally support for war abroad, using the spread of democracy as a legitimizing reason. We tested whether those endorsing inequality would invoke democracy to support military action when a major threat, the September 11th attacks in the United States, created an environment supportive of fighting in the name of democratic beliefs.

In sum, across three studies, we predicted that people in Western democratic societies who are more supportive of inequality would more closely tie their beliefs about democracy to their support for militancy than those who are less supportive of inequality.

Study 1

Method

Participants. Data were analyzed from the Global Views 2010: American Public Opinion and Foreign Policy survey (Bouton, Kull, Page, Veltcheva, & Wright, 2010). Participants were randomly selected American citizens who completed the survey using an online interface. The full sample size was 982, composed of 503 men and 479 women. Of these participants, 759 identified as White, 70 identified as Black, 82 identified as Hispanic, and 71 identified as having mixed ethnicities. The age of participants ranged from 18 to 75 years and older, measured with seven categories (e.g., 18–24, 25–34). The average age fell in the 45–54 range.

The dependent variables were presented to random, partially overlapping subsamples, so the sample size changed depending on the analysis. The measure concerning support for strikes on Iran included 663 respondents, and the measure concerning military strength included 646 respondents.

Procedure and measures. Participants were asked several questions on a variety of political and social issues. The following constructs were selected for analysis.

Desire to spread democracy. Desire to spread democracy was measured with a single item, the degree of importance participants attached to “helping to bring a democratic form of government to other nations.” Respondents rated this item on the following scale: 3 (*very*

important), 2 (somewhat important), or 1 (not important at all).

Proxy for support for inequality: Redistribution of resources. We used opposition to redistribution of resources as a measure of support for inequality in Study 1. Although this is not a perfect measure we follow previous researchers who have used measures of opposition to government redistribution of wealth as a measure of nonegalitarian beliefs (Davidson, Steinmann, & Wegener, 1995). Opposition to redistribution was measured with a single item with two response options. Participants rated which of two statements was closer to their point of view by selecting (a) government should do more to solve problems and help meet the needs of people, or (b) government is doing too many things better left to businesses and individuals.

Our measure of support for inequality may overlap too much with belief in government regulation, and thus not capture support for inequality. To account for this overlap, we included a measure of political party preference (reduced involvement of government is an important component of the Republican Party platform) and its interaction term with support for redistribution of resources to better isolate variance capturing the belief that the government should regulate income disparities and to decrease the influence of preferences about the size and involvement of government. Republican Party identification was measured on a 7-point scale coded 1 = *strong Democrat* to 7 = *strong Republican*. Controlling for party identification in no way makes our measure about redistribution of resources a precise measure of inequalitarianism, but it helps to minimize alternative influences.

Support for the military and military action. Participants responded to questions concerning support for the military and military action. The first concerned American treatment of Iran given continued enrichment of uranium, with options of increasing severity ranging from 1 (*not pressure Iran to stop enriching uranium*), 2 (*continue diplomatic efforts to get Iran to stop enriching uranium*), 3 (*impose economic sanctions on Iran*), to 4 (*carry out a military strike against Iran's nuclear energy facilities*). For the second item, participants rated the question "Which

is more important in a country's power and influence in the world?" coded 0 = economic strength or 1 = military strength. These items were randomly assigned to the participants, with less than a third answering them both (see Participants section). Consequently, our analyses considered each item separately.

Results

We conducted a 3 (low vs. medium vs. high support for democracy) $\times$ 2 (support for redistribution vs. no support for distribution of resources) analysis of variance, predicting each military-support item separately. Predicting support for strikes against Iran, main effects of support for inequality, $F(1, 657) = 21.14$, $MSE = 12.65$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$, and support for democracy, $F(1, 657) = 6.17$, $MSE = 3.69$, $p = .03$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$, were qualified by the predicted two-way interaction, $F(1, 657) = 6.17$, $MSE = 6.10$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$. For people who did not support resource distribution, strong and mid-range support for spreading democracy was associated with tendencies toward supporting military strikes against Iran. For people who supported resource distribution, there was no association between support for spreading democracy and reactions to Iran (see Figure 1).

For the second dependent variable, we used logistic regression to predict support for a strong military versus a strong economy because the dependent variable was dichotomous. The main effects of support for resource redistribution, $\chi^2(1) = 7.09$, $p = .01$, and support for democracy, $\chi^2(2) = 7.95$, $p = .02$, were qualified by the predicted two-way interaction, $\chi^2(2) = 7.10$, $p = .03$. For participants who did not support resource redistribution, each increase in support for democracy resulted in an increase in support for the military. Participants who supported resource distribution showed no relationship between support for spreading democracy and support for the military (see Figure 2).

As mentioned, we also controlled for Republican Party identification and the interaction between Republican Party identification and support for redistribution of resources specifically in Study 1 to minimize the influence of mere opposition to government intervention. This control did not eliminate the two-way interac-

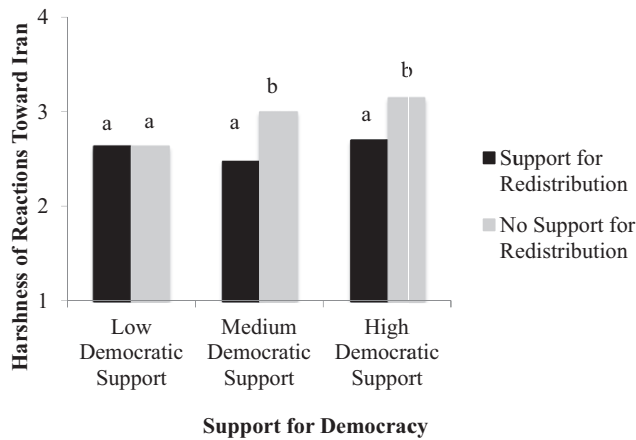


Figure 1. Study 1: Support for equality and democracy predict harsh reactions toward Iran. The harshest option was military action against Iran. Letters above the bars different from one another indicate different means. $p < .05$.

tion between support for democracy and support for redistribution on both support for strikes, $F(1, 655) = 6.00$, $MSE = 3.50$ $p = .003$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$, and support for military power, $\chi^2(2) = 6.80$, $p = .03$.

Discussion

Using a representative sample, Study 1 established the basic phenomenon of democracy as a legitimizing ideology such that greater support for the spread of democracy was associated with support for militarism particularly among those who were more opposed to the redistribution of resources, our proxy for support for inequality.

Although the results of Study 1 were found in a large representative sample and across two measures of support for the military, there were limitations we aimed to address in the studies that follow. Study 2 aimed to replicate our findings with alternative measures of our key constructs and in countries outside of the United States while exploring a cultural boundary condition for the effect.

Study 2

Democracy as a hierarchy-enhancing legitimizing ideology should be observed only in

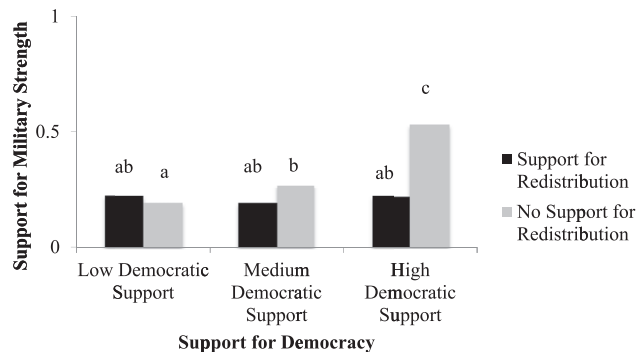


Figure 2. Study 1: Support for equality and democracy predict support for military strength. Letters above the bars different from one another indicate different means, $p < .05$. Values on the y axis represent the percent of participants in a cell supporting military strength (0 = 0%, 1 = 100%).

places where democracy is seen positively and has moral authority, and Study 2 explored this boundary condition. In contexts in which democracy is not an active and widely endorsed system of governance, we did not expect it to be attractive for justifying militarism. This seemingly obvious and intuitive prediction contains an underlying complex inference that not just any abstract and putatively hierarchy-attenuating value system can be coopted for hierarchy-enhancing means. Cultural context matters.

Method

Participants. Data were analyzed from the European Values Survey integrated data file from the years 1999 to 2001. The data were collected in face-to-face interviews. For more information, see [European Values Survey \(2009\)](#). The selected measures were available from 19,554 participants from European countries in the years 1999 ($N = 17,225$), 2000 ($N = 1,390$), and 2001 ($N = 939$). Participants were 9,909 men and 9,641 women (four did not report sex) from 21 countries in Europe (see [Table 1](#) for a list of countries and descriptive statistics). The data set combined national- and individual-level data.

Procedure and measures. Participants were asked several questions on a variety of political and social issues. The following constructs were selected for analysis.

National level: Democracy. The extent that democracy represents a cultural value at the national level was measured using the “political culture” scale developed by The Economists Intelligence Unit ([Kekic, 2007](#)). We refer to this construct as *political democratization*. This scale uses expert ratings and survey data to measure the extent to which democratic values have propagated within a country’s population. The scale anchors ranged from 1 to 10, with 10 representing the highest endorsement of democratic political culture (e.g., “Is there a sufficient degree of societal consensus and cohesion to underpin a stable, functioning democracy?”; see [Table 1](#) for the score for each country).

Individual level: Satisfaction with democracy. Satisfaction with democracy was measured with five items. Four items were measured on a 4-point scale ranging from 1 = *strongly dis-*

agree to 4 = *agree strongly* and were coded so that higher numbers indicated greater democracy support. Participants rated their agreement with the statements “In democracy, the economic system runs badly” (reverse coded), “Democracies are indecisive and have too much squabbling” (reverse coded), “Democracies aren’t good at maintaining order” (reverse coded), and “Democracy may have problems but it’s better than any other form of government.” The remaining fifth question asked, “On the whole, are you very satisfied, rather satisfied, not very satisfied, or not at all satisfied with the way democracy is developing in our country?” where respondents chose from options ranging from 1 = *not at all satisfied* to 4 = *very satisfied*. The five items were averaged to create a reliable scale ($\alpha = .72$).

Individual level: Support for inequality. Two items measured support for inequality. The first asked participants to place their beliefs about economic equality on a scale from 1 = *incomes should be made more equal* to 10 = *we need larger income differences as incentives*. The second asked the extent to which participants thought that “eliminating big inequalities in income between citizens” is 1 = *very important* to 4 = *not at all important*. These items were transformed into z scores and averaged to create a scale, $r = .34$, $p < .001$.

Individual level: Confidence in the armed forces. Using a single item, participants rated how much confidence they had in the armed forces of their country with the following response options: 1 = *none at all*, 2 = *not very much*, 3 = *quite a lot*, or 4 = *a great deal*.³

Results

To test the hypothesis that the relationship between support for democracy and support for inequality would emerge only in cultures with strong democratic traditions, we computed multilevel models using Mplus Version 6.11 ([Muthén & Muthén, 1998–2011](#)). We grand-mean centered the country-level political democratization measure and group-mean centered the individual-level measures of inequality and support for democracy (see [Enders & Tofighi, 2007](#)).

³ Confidence in the military is not identical to support for war, but it reflects a positive attitude toward the military.

Table 1
Study 2: Country-Level Means and Standard Deviations

Country	Sample <i>N</i>	Democratic political culture	Support for democracy		Support for inequality (<i>z</i>)		Confidence in armed forces	
			<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Austria	1,175	8.75	3.11	0.44	−0.09	0.76	2.34	0.77
Belgium	1,509	6.88	2.74	0.55	0.00	0.81	2.23	0.85
Bulgaria	672	5.00	2.72	0.62	0.25	0.85	2.61	0.78
Belarus	548	4.38	2.69	0.48	0.15	0.96	2.74	0.81
Croatia	798	5.63	2.84	0.44	−0.25	0.71	2.69	0.77
Czech Republic	1,569	8.13	2.65	0.46	0.10	0.83	2.16	0.65
Estonia	577	7.50	2.71	0.44	0.27	0.70	2.24	0.74
Finland	842	8.75	2.86	0.41	−0.16	0.75	3.08	0.67
France	1,243	7.50	2.60	0.57	−0.20	0.81	2.67	0.94
Iceland	776	10.00	3.11	0.38	−0.04	0.78	2.27	0.83
Ireland	726	8.75	2.92	0.45	0.01	0.67	2.71	0.84
Italy	1,537	8.13	2.75	0.44	0.10	0.78	2.52	0.82
Lithuania	500	5.63	2.54	0.50	0.00	0.87	2.38	0.61
Luxembourg	734	8.75	3.06	0.47	0.28	0.73	2.51	0.85
Netherlands	929	10.00	2.97	0.35	0.38	0.68	2.31	0.69
Poland	734	5.63	2.43	0.50	0.02	0.75	2.82	0.81
Romania	796	5.00	2.41	0.57	−0.45	0.75	3.16	0.75
Russian Federation	1,444	3.75	2.19	0.55	0.33	0.80	2.81	0.89
Slovenia	802	6.88	2.55	0.48	−0.29	0.80	2.37	0.82
Turkey	939	3.75	2.61	0.51	−0.60	0.77	3.34	0.93
United Kingdom	704	8.13	2.81	0.48	0.15	0.76	3.08	0.71
Total sample	19,554	<i>M</i> = 7.06 <i>SD</i> = 1.89	2.71	0.54	0.00	0.82	2.60	0.87

Note. Democratic political culture is a score provided for each country as derived by [Kekic \(2007\)](#), with means and standard deviations derived from the subsample of 21 countries considered here. All other measures were measured at the individual level in the European Values Survey.

Confidence in the armed forces was regressed on national-level democratic political culture, individual-level support for democracy, individual-level support for inequality, and all possible interaction terms in a continuous Political Culture $\times$ continuous Support for Inequality $\times$ continuous Support for Democracy multilevel model (see [Table 2](#) for estimates). A random

Table 2
Study 2: Multilevel Regression Showing Three-Way Interaction Between Support for Democracy, Support for Inequality, and Democratic Political Culture Predicting Confidence in the Armed Forces

Variable	Support for inequality model	
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>
Main effects		
Support for democracy	0.05	0.03
Support for inequality	0.01	0.02
Democratic political culture	−0.08**	0.03
Cross-level interactions		
Support for democracy $\times$ Support for inequality	0.03*	0.01
Support for democracy $\times$ Democratic political culture	0.03 ⁺	0.01
Support for inequality $\times$ Democratic political culture	0.02	0.01
Support for democracy $\times$ Support for inequality $\times$ Democratic political culture	0.02***	0.005

⁺ *p* < .10. * *p* < .05. ** *p* < .01. *** *p* < .001.

intercept and random slopes for support for democracy, inequality, and the interaction between support for democracy and inequality were specified to take into account the possibility that the average level of confidence in the armed forces varied depending on the national-level democratic context. All lower level interactions and simple slopes were tested at ± 1 SD of the relevant measures.

The predicted three-way interaction was significant ($b = 0.02$, $SE = 0.005$, $p < .001$). Probing this interaction showed that the two-way interaction between support for democracy and support for inequality was nonsignificant (as were the underlying simple slopes) for countries with low levels of democratic values ($b = -0.01$, $SE = 0.01$, $p = .52$; see the left side of Figure 3), but was significant for those countries with high levels of democratic values ($b = 0.07$, $SE = 0.02$, $p = .001$; see the right side of Figure 3).

Exploring the simple slopes of this significant two-way interaction for countries at higher levels of national democratic values, there was a significant positive relationship between support for democracy and confidence in the military for participants who supported inequality ($b = 0.16$, $SE = 0.04$, $p < .001$). No relationship emerged between support for democracy and confidence in the military for participants who opposed inequality ($b = 0.06$, $SE = 0.05$,

$p = .21$). These results replicate and extend the basic phenomenon established in Study 1, demonstrating that in highly democratic countries, those who are more supportive of inequality show a relationship between support for democracy and support for the military, whereas there is no relationship between support for democracy and support for the military for people who are more supportive of equality. This same interaction did not emerge in countries with low levels of political democratization.

Discussion

Study 2 explored contexts that bound the relationship between democracy support and military attitudes for those more likely to support inequality. In a representative sample of adults in 21 European countries that varied in their cultural endorsement of democratic processes, we found the expected relationship between support for democracy and positive military attitudes only among those more likely to support inequality, and only in those countries rated higher in country-level democracy support. In countries with lower levels of democracy support, individual levels of democratic support did not influence levels of positive military attitudes for anyone. These results suggest that the likelihood of a belief or value such as

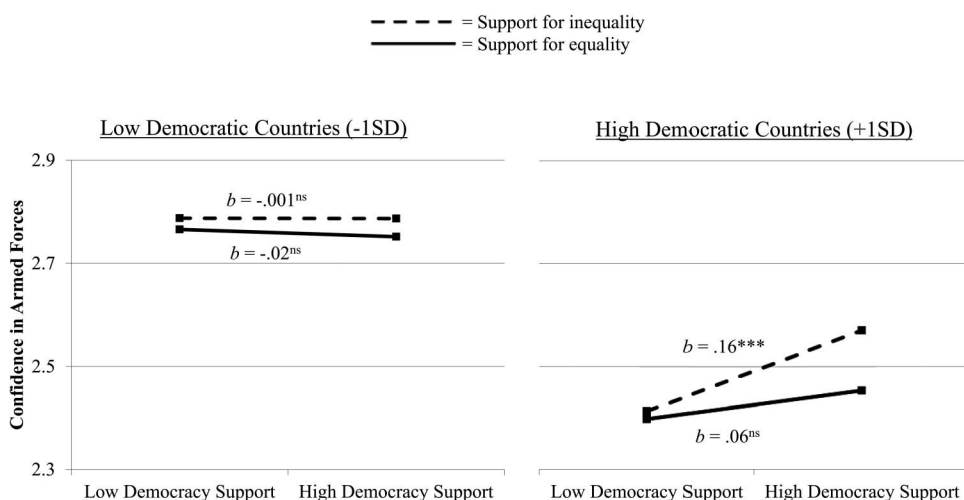


Figure 3. Study 2: Confidence in armed forces driven by national democracy, support for democracy, and support for inequality. ns = not significant. *** $p < .001$.

democracy to serve as a legitimizing ideology depends on the political context.

A closer examination of the results reveals an intriguing main effect: Respondents from countries with lower support for democratic values showed greater overall confidence in the military compared with those from countries with higher support ($b = -0.08$, $SE = 0.03$, $p = .01$). This main effect could be due to a number of interesting factors: Perhaps in less democratic countries the military runs aspects of governance efficiently and well enough to meet the needs of the people, providing resources such as employment and security (see, e.g., Siddiqua, 2007). This kind of assistance from the military would also help explain why there was no relationship between support for democracy and militarism: There may be other compelling reasons for supporting the military in these contexts. Alternatively, perhaps those in less democratic countries are wary of criticizing aspects of the government (including the military) in survey-based interviews.⁴ Conversely, in more democratic contexts, people have less confidence in the armed forces as a means of achieving goals. This point is not in contradiction to our hypotheses; despite an overall lack of support for militarism in democratic societies, some people can still invoke democratic beliefs for the purpose of rallying support for militarism.

Study 3

In addition to replicating the basic findings of Studies 1 and 2, Study 3 was designed to show the importance of historical context for the ideological cooptation of democracy by examining these effects in an American panel study conducted in 2000, before the attacks of September 11, 2001, and 2004, after the United States military engaged in the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Much research has documented how the events of 9/11 triggered a great deal of negative attitudes against Arabs and Muslims in the United States and support for war against Arab and Muslim countries (Morgan, Wisneski, & Skitka, 2011). For the present study, we were concerned with how 9/11 may have catalyzed a strengthened relationship between attitudes about democracy and attitudes about the military, but only for those who support inequality.

Hierarchy-enhancing legitimizing ideologies require harmful or destructive actions to legitimize, but in 2000, the year of the first wave of data, the United States was not engaged in any high-profile military activity. By 2004, the United States had full military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. Many Americans were critical of this military activity; consequently, this military activity required justification. The president at the time, George W. Bush, repeatedly invoked the spread of democracy as a reason for these invasions (see examples in the general introduction).

We derived three hypotheses. First, we expected satisfaction with democracy to increase from before to after 9/11 among those who supported inequality. Such a pattern would set the stage for the use of democracy as a legitimizing ideology for this group. Second, we expected those who supported inequality to associate attitudes about democracy with military support more after 9/11 compared with before. Third, we expected those who supported inequality to associate attitudes about democracy with military support more than those who supported equality in 2004.

Method

Participants. Data were analyzed from the American National Election Studies panel completed in 2000 and 2004. Participants were randomly selected American citizens who participated in face-to-face interviews or random-digit-dial telephone interviews to compose a sample representative of the American population. For more information about the sampling procedures, see National Election Studies (2006).

To assess change in support for militarism over time (before and after American military activity), we considered only participants who completed all requisite measures of support for

⁴ Another possibility is that in less democratic countries people have a more diffuse understanding of what democracy is, and the lack of relationship we report between support for democracy and support for militarism in less democratic contexts could be due to the more prosaic lack of reliability of the support for democracy scale in those contexts. However, at the country level of analysis, there was no relationship between the political democratization measure and the reliability of the support for democracy scale in that country ($r = -.26$, $p = .25$, $n = 21$).

militarism, support for democracy, and support for inequality in both the 2000 and 2004 waves of the study, resulting in 695 participants, including 305 men and 390 women. Of these participants, 584 identified as White, nine Asian, 20 Hispanic, and 41 as Black, with 41 having mixed or other ethnicities, or not responding. The age of participants ranged from 18 to 93 years ($M = 50.53$ years, $SD = 15.12$).

Procedure and measures. Participants were asked several questions on a variety of political issues. The following constructs were selected for analysis.

Satisfaction with democracy. The key variable in these analyses was that of satisfaction with democracy, which was measured in 2000 and 2004. The item asked, "On the whole, are you satisfied, fairly satisfied, not very satisfied, or not at all satisfied with the way democracy works in the United States?" The item was coded so that 4 = *satisfied* and 1 = *not at all satisfied*.

Opposition to equality. A scale of opposition to equality was created from items available in 2000 only, including three that measured opposition on Likert scales anchored at 1 = *strongly agree* and 5 = *strongly disagree*, with the following items: "One of the big problems in this country is that we don't give everyone an equal chance," "If people were treated more equally in this country we would have many fewer problems," and "Our society should do whatever is necessary to make sure that everyone has an equal opportunity to succeed" ($\alpha = .59$).⁵ This formulation of opposition to equality is especially connected to ideologies that legitimize inequality between groups, including "subtle legitimizing ideologies, conservatism, and opposition to redistributive social policies" (Ho et al., 2012, p. 583; see also Jost & Thompson, 2000).⁶

Support for militarism. We selected items concerning support for militarism that were measured in both 2000 and 2004 of the panel, and therefore could be used to observe changes from before September 11, 2001 to after. The military feeling thermometer had respondents rate on a scale from 0 to 100 how favorably they felt toward the military, with 100 = *very favorable feelings* and 0 = *very unfavorable feelings*. A spending on defense measure asked respondents whether federal spending on defense should be 3 = *increased*, 2 = *kept about the same*, or 1 = *decreased*.

Results

Increased satisfaction with democracy among supporters of inequality. We first tested the hypothesis that in 2000, before the September 11 attacks, there would be no relationship between democracy support and opposition to equality, but in 2004, after the United States engaged in war with Afghanistan and Iraq, there would be a relationship but only for those who supported inequality. A 2 (within-subjects year: 2000 vs. 2004) $\times$ continuous Opposition to Equality mixed-model analysis of variance predicting satisfaction with democracy was analyzed, and showed a statistically significant two-way interaction, $F(1, 701) = 4.80$, $MSE = 1.97$, $p = .03$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$. A simple slopes analysis confirmed that the opposition to equality relationship with satisfaction with democracy held only in 2004, $F(1, 701) = 10.79$, $MSE = 4.35$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$ (year 2000, $p = .86$; see Figure 4). Those opposing egalitarianism changed their satisfaction with democracy from 2000 to 2004, whereas those endorsing egalitarianism remained at the same level of democracy endorsement over time.

Democracy satisfaction predicting the military feeling thermometer.

Change over time. The next analyses tested the hypothesis that the relationship between democracy satisfaction and positive feelings toward the military would increase from 2000 to 2004, but only among those who opposed equality. This analysis conceptually and ideally would test a three-way interaction between year, satisfaction with democracy, and opposition to equality to predict the military feeling thermometer. How-

⁵ This alpha is relatively low by standards in psychology, but reliabilities for similar scales "are generally mediocre at best" (see Feldman, 1999, p. 163, for some explanations); nevertheless, such scales have been used successfully in prior research, including the original validation of the items in the scale (Feldman, 1988; see also Sears, Henry, & Kosterman, 2000).

⁶ Three other items were included in the survey that represent egalitarianism, including "We have gone too far in pushing equal rights in this country," "This country would be better off if we worried less about how equal people are," and "It is not really that big a problem if some people have more of a chance in life than others." These items were left out of the equality scale because they are conceptually separate from opposition to equality and may serve a separate function (Sears et al., 2000; see also Jost & Thompson, 2000).

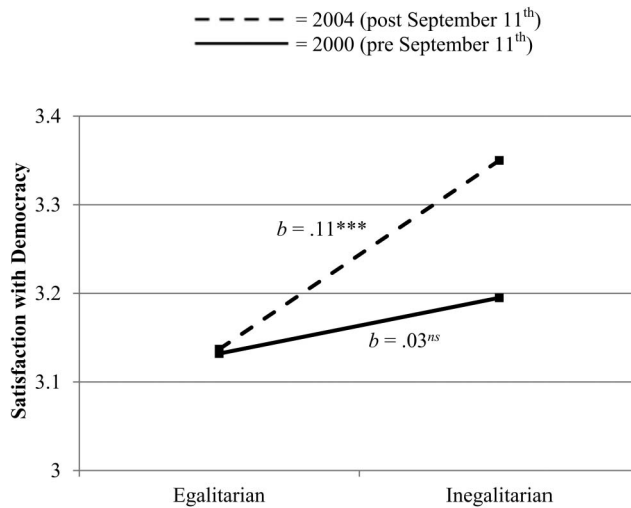


Figure 4. Study 3: Inegalitarianism predicting support for democracy, by year. ns = not significant. *** $p < .001$.

ever, the slopes of democracy satisfaction predicting the military thermometer involved completely nonoverlapping measures from 2000 to 2004; a proper test of a three-way interaction cannot be conducted when both a predictor variable (here, satisfaction with democracy) and an outcome variable (here, the military thermometer) change over time.⁷

Consequently, we used an alternative strategy that compared simple slopes derived from two-way interactions, and then determined the statistical significance of the comparisons of slopes of theoretical interest based on the non-overlapping dependent correlation comparisons (Raghunathan, Rosenthal, & Rubin, 1996).⁸ This analysis is conceptually similar to testing the difference between correlations that results in a z score.

Figures 5 and 6 report the slopes and the z scores for their differences. For those who were more likely to oppose equality, the slope significantly steepened from 2000 to 2004 (see the right side of Figure 5). However, for those who were more likely to support equality, the magnitude of the slope of democracy satisfaction predicting the military thermometer did not change over time (see left side of Figure 5).⁹

Comparing 2004 participants across endorsement of egalitarianism. If democracy satisfaction had special political expediency in

2004 for those who opposed equality, then the democracy–militarism relationship should be especially strong for those more likely to oppose equality in 2004. This two-way continuous Democracy Satisfaction $\times$ continuous Egalitarianism interaction predicting the military thermometer in 2004 was marginally significant, $F(1, 681) = 3.38$, $MSE = 1125.25$, $p = .07$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$. That is, the democracy–militarism slope was marginally steeper for those who opposed equality more compared with those

⁷ Another way to analyze these data could be a multilevel approach using support for inequality as a Level 2 predictor variable and support for democracy as a Level 1 variable nested within participants with one value for each year. However, this approach was not possible given the low number of time points available.

⁸ The simple slopes are nonoverlapping dependent correlations because the variables in the correlations we were comparing are different from one another (i.e., nonoverlapping), but yet they included data from the same participants (i.e., dependent).

⁹ Two-way interactions were computed for determining the simple slopes analyzed in Figure 5. These included the continuous Democracy Satisfaction $\times$ continuous Egalitarianism interaction predicting the military thermometer in 2000 and 2004. The 2000 interaction was not significant: $F(1, 685) = 2.51$, $MSE = 995.72$, $p = .11$, $\eta_p^2 = .04$, indicating the slope for support for democracy in 2000 did not change based on levels of support for inequality. The same interaction in 2004 is reported in the text in the next section.

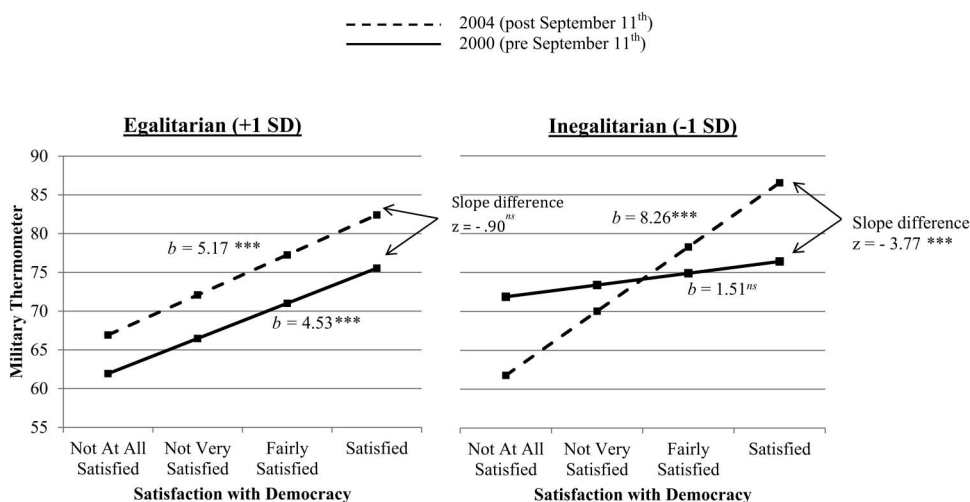


Figure 5. Study 3: Satisfaction with democracy interacting with egalitarianism to predict military thermometer in 2000 and 2004. ns = not significant. *** $p < .001$.

who support equality more (see the slopes graphed in Figure 5).

Democracy satisfaction predicting support for military spending.

Change over time. We ran the same analysis predicting support for military spending as we ran for the military thermometer. As with the analyses for Figure 5, we compared the simple slopes shown in Figure 6 by deriving them from the possible two-way interactions and determining the statistical significance of the difference by comparing the nonoverlapping dependent correlations. Replicating the results for the military thermometer, the simple slopes analysis for those more likely to oppose equality showed the slope significantly steepened from 2000 to 2004 (see the right side of Figure 6). However, for those more likely to support equality, the magnitude of the slope of democracy satisfaction predicting the military thermometer did not change over time (see left side of Figure 6).¹⁰

Comparing 2004 participants across endorsement of egalitarianism. Again, we expected the democracy–militarism relationship to be especially strong for those who opposed equality compared to those who supported it in 2004. However, this two-way continuous Democracy Satisfaction $\times$ Continuous Egalitarianism interaction predicting support for military

spending in 2004 was not statistically significant, $F(1, 579) = 0.24$, $MSE = 0.10$.

Discussion

Study 3 demonstrated how historical contexts can change the relationship between democracy support and military support, particularly for those who are more supportive of inequality. This study examined attitudes in the same participants at two time points, the year 2000 (prior to the U.S. engagement in war) and the year 2004 (after the U.S. engaged in wars in Afghanistan and Iraq). Prior to September 11, 2001, those who supported inequality showed little to no relationship between democracy support and militarism; however, this relationship significantly increased in the United States following the 9/11 attacks with the necessity of justifica-

¹⁰ Two-way interactions were computed for determining the simple slopes analyzed in Figure 6. The continuous Democracy Satisfaction $\times$ continuous Egalitarianism interaction predicting support for military spending in 2000 was significant: $F(1, 579) = 4.43$, $b = -0.07$, $MSE = 1.77$, $SE = 0.04$, $p = .04$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$. The same interaction in 2004 was not significant: $F(1, 579) = 0.24$, $b = 0.02$, $MSE = 0.10$, $SE = 0.04$, $p = .62$, $\eta_p^2 = <.001$. Again, for the purposes of this analysis, we were more interested in change across years of the survey, which required the simple slope analysis described in the text.

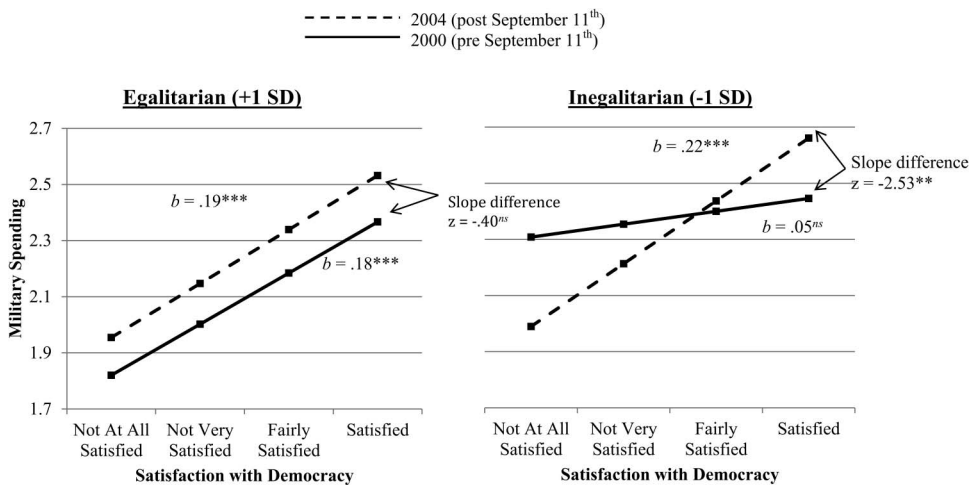


Figure 6. Study 3: Satisfaction with democracy interacting with egalitarianism to predict military spending in 2000 and 2004. ns = not significant. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

tions for American militarism in Afghanistan and, later, Iraq.

We had also expected the 2004 slopes for the democracy–militarism relationship to be stronger among those who opposed equality compared with those who supported it. However, the results were mixed, showing a marginally steeper slope for those who opposed equality for the military feeling thermometer, but no difference for the military spending item. These results raise a further important question. Why is there a significant slope between democracy satisfaction and militarism for those who support equality? We did not expect this relationship, nor is it consistent with the null effects for more egalitarian participants in Studies 1 and 2. We could rule out an explanation of the justification of militarism: This relationship held even during a time of relative inactivity by the U.S. military (in 2000). We might also rule out motives of hierarchy enhancement, as these participants were those who claimed to endorse egalitarianism, not the opposite. The answer will require further analysis to understand those circumstances when even those who support equality will tether beliefs about militarism to beliefs about democracy.¹¹

Nevertheless, the main pattern of interest is that the magnitude of the relationship changes from 2000 to 2004 for those who opposed equality. We interpret this pattern to be sugges-

tive of an awakening to the utility of democratic beliefs in the service of militarism when militarism requires justification for those who oppose equality.

General Discussion

This article provides the first data-driven evidence from public opinion of how beliefs about democracy may serve to justify techniques that maintain group-based hierarchies in the world. Three studies explored the effect and boundary conditions of how beliefs about democracy can be related to support for militarism among those who support inequality. Study 1 showed that in a recent sample of representative Americans, support for the spread of democracy was particularly associated with militarism against Iran for those who opposed redistribution of resources (a form of inequality support). Study 2 showed that this kind of effect is found only in those cultural contexts where democratic values are upheld, using a sample of respondents in European countries that ranged in their adher-

¹¹ One possibility might be in the abstractness of the variable concerning militarism. In Study 1, also of a sample of Americans, the items were about the more concrete use of the military in a global setting. The Study 3 items were more abstract, about feelings toward the military and attitudes about military spending, but not directly about military aggression.

ence to democratic political systems. Study 3 showed that historical contexts in which militarism requires justification may trigger a relationship between democratic beliefs and militarism for those more likely to oppose equality; in the United States after 9/11, those more likely to oppose equality showed a stronger relationship between satisfaction with democracy and militarism compared to before 9/11.

The basic effect replicated for the most part across three different studies using different representative samples of adults. The same findings emerged despite the use of different conceptualizations of support for inequality, democracy, and militarism. This convergence of evidence across multiple samples and multiple measures triangulates on the idea that the language of democracy can be used by some as an effective legitimizing ideology in the service of spreading inequalities through militarism.

This research builds off the theory of motivated ideological construal (Knowles et al., 2009) by considering the case of democracy as an ideology that would normally be considered a hierarchy-attenuating ideology (as considered by social dominance theorists; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999), but that can be used as a hierarchy-enhancing or -maintaining ideology given the right motives and the right context. Similar approaches have been used to test the construal of ideologies such as colorblindness (Knowles et al., 2009), fairness (Pratto et al., 1999), and diversity (Unzueta et al., 2012). Our studies further introduced a novel way of testing these ideas that moves beyond mediation models (Crandall & Eshleman, 2003; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999; Pratto, Sidanius, & Levin, 2006) to include moderation models for differentiating the motives of different types of people. This analysis can show how very different people can endorse the same ideology but for different motivational reasons.

To be clear (and to risk stating the obvious), democracy is not the only language available to justify militarism and war as a means of promoting social inequality. Other more blatant legitimizing ideologies include simple prejudice or dislike toward people of another culture (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). However, in the current era in the United States, such open expressions of prejudice are typically unacceptable. For example, in explaining his military incursions in the Middle East following 9/11, George W.

Bush was careful to show that prejudice was not driving his decisions (Panagopoulos, 2006). Other more justifiable beliefs could include the idea that another country poses a serious threat to security, or another country is harboring terrorist cells or weapons of mass destruction. Nor is the language of democracy the only normally hierarchy-attenuating ideology that has been coopted in the service of justifying militarism. Feminism, a belief system designed to promote social equality between the genders, has also been used to justify military incursions into Afghanistan (in the putative service of promoting greater gender equality in the Muslim world; Ferguson, 2006; Shepherd, 2006).

On a final note, although this research is about the use of the language of democracy as a legitimizing ideology, it is not a criticism of democracy as a system of governance. That perspective has had expression in other venues (Dahl, 1989; Zakaria, 2003) and is not relevant here. We believe that one can have faith in democracy as an effective political system while simultaneously being aware of the use of democracy as a potential hierarchy-enhancing legitimizing ideology, and such faith in democracy is not intended to be diagnostic of nefarious psychological motives for everyone in society. Indeed, some of the data presented here (in Study 2) show that in Europe, people from countries where democratic values are endorsed are more critical of the military compared to people from countries where democratic values are less endorsed.

In conclusion, the present analyses represent an invitation for further consideration of a broader range of ideologies and uses of language as a justification of means to perpetuate and enhance inequalities in the world. In an era of increasing intolerance toward expressions of blatant prejudice and colonial superiority, increasingly subtle ideologies will likely gain in political attractiveness. Such analyses will have increasing urgency for understanding global politics in the new millennium.

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